



Kenneth A. Gibson
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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AMERICAN CITIES IN DISASTER

Newark's Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson, in a speech before the Citizen's Committee on Public Education tonight (Tuesday, February 4, 1975) in Philadelphia, emphasized the increasing difficulty of trying to provide youngsters in large American cities with high quality public education.

"You are aware, as I am," Gibson said, " that the vital organs of the nation always have been and will remain its urban centers. In the cities, the life blood of the country exists -- the very heart of our systems of transportation, communication, industry, banking, trade, government and, yes, learning -- both secondary and higher education. Also in our cities. And what we as Mayors -- representatives of Urban America are saying is that wherever American cities are going the rest of the country must follow. I would warn you against believing too quickly the popular rhetoric about America becoming one gigantic, sprawling suburb.

"Are not those old and rotting boarding houses -- brownstones in the so called ghettos of New York, Washington, D.C., Boston, here in Philadelphia and, yes, even in Newark -- houses that once owners would almost give away now being bought and sold for 40 to 50,000 dollars and more? I believe in America's cities; I believe in their visibility and in the strength and courage of the people in them," the Mayor continued.

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add one

"I believe also," Gibson continued, " that in order to prevent even greater economic hardship on all Americans -- not just the least advantaged and powerless -- enactment of more equitable tax and distribution policies is imperative. Cities must receive increased general revenue sharing aid as well as funds to encourage urban economic growth and development. This is the only way we can guarantee the provision of quality services that each American citizen deserves. Simultaneously, we must implement now economic policies to provide full employment throughout these United States."

The Mayor went on to say, " Unlike your city, the Newark Board of Education cannot levy its own taxes; the school system is fiscally dependent upon the City. So in order to reduce the City's budget gap I was forced to cut the Board of Education's budget at the same rate I cut other departments in the City. That cut to the Board of Education was 17 million dollars. Yes, 17 million dollars from the service that aides the growth and development of our young people. That may mean taking away a microscope from a young Black boy from Howard Street who might discover a cure for cancer; That may mean depriving a bright, young Italian or Hispanic Girl, of an opportunity which might have -- eventually led her to find new energy sources, for the nation and the world; That may mean limiting the potential of thousands of young, hopeful children who haven't learned that some people in this nation feel that making a 1200% profit today is more important than how well these young people will function and what they will value as adults tomorrow."

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add two

"Yes, I cut 17 million from the Board of Education's budget and I am not ashamed to tell you such a decision produces many sleepless nights," Mayor Gibson said.

"So it is, Gibson said, "somehow in this great nation we have found ways to find resources to pay for billions of dollars in cost-over-rides for bombers, battle ships and rockets."

"It is my hope though, that before it is too late -- and I must say I believe the rate of inflation and the depth of the recession are helping the process--we will begin to understand that the various components of this society -- systems and institutions, both public and private -- must function cooperatively for the common good," according to the Mayor.

"It was James Baldwin who said, 'one of the great paradoxes of education (is) that precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience, you must find yourself at war with your society. And if you consider yourself an educated person it is your responsibility to change that society,'" Gibson said.

"Although I am not quite at war with this society yet -- and I recognize the gambit there -- I am trying, in some small ways, to change it so that it is more equitable and humane." Mayor Gibson concluded.